AN UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO THE BIHAR HINDU SABHA

BY

Jata Shankar Jha

During my recent survey of old records in private custodies I came across some highly significant papers in the Darbhanga Raj Archives, one of them being the proceedings of the first meeting called for the establishment of the Bihar Hindu Sabha. The record under study is important for various reasons. It shows, among other things, the reaction of Hindus in Bihar against the establishment of the All India Muslim League (1906) and provision of separate electorate under Morley-Minto Reforms (1908-09). It may be mentioned here that no book hitherto published on this subject has touched this point. It has been taken for granted by all the writers on the subject that the existing communal harmony precluded any adverse reaction against the privileges conferred on the Muslims under the said reforms.[1] In their opinion, during this period, Bihar thought of nothing else than an early separation from Bengal. Even more surprising is the fact that none of our leaders who were associated with the organisation has referred to this event in their writings. Possibly the events of later years and also the high position they came to occupy in public life prevented them from doing so. Another fact which is also very conspicuous is the very large number of delegates attending the meeting from one single caste. Their over-representation in the Executive body and sub-committees of the Sabha is also, revealing from the view-point of Caste-movement in Bihar.

Parmeshwar Lal, an eminent Barrister and public man, was the

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1 The author of the "Creation of Modern Bihar" has (p. 159) referred to The Bengalee which advocated the creation of a Hindu Mahasabha in Bihar to look after the interests of Hindus. He admits the fact that in Bihar Muslim were getting more favoured treatment than Hindus in matters of government services but he views the move for a Hindu Mahasabha as "a manoeuver to break the unity between Muslims and Hindus of Bihar which had been forged on the issue of it's separation". So it may be a surprise to the author and others to find the name of Sachchidanand Singh and others as the founders of the Bihar Hindu Mahasabha with aims and objects similar to those advocated by the Bengalee.

chief organiser of the meeting. In a circular letter (26 May 1911), addressed to Maharaja Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga he wrote the following as his main consideration for the setting up of a Hindu Sabha.

"When the question of the over-representation of Mohammadans was raised a little while ago in the Vice-regal Council, every Mohammadan Member present including Hon'ble Mazharul Haque reproached the Hon'ble Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya[2] for having raised a question which only created bad blood and it is much to be regretted that no Hindu Member that day voiced the strong feeling that exists among the members of our community on this important question, although the Press the very next day from every quarter showed how very rightly the Pandit had acted in bringing to the fore the question in the way that he did. Since then the Muslim League has been even more militant than ever. As an instance in point I beg to refer to the recent action of the League in the Allahabad Municipality. It is not to be denied that much of this activity is due to the false steps taken by the Government of India, in according to the Mohammadan representation in the Council in excess of their numbers, which the Mohammadans have construed into a concession to their so called political importance and loyalty. It is true that some Mohammadan leaders especially the Hon'ble Mr. Mazharul Haque regret the unhappy attitude at present assumed by the Muslims of India, but the attitude of such leaders does not have much effect on the main body of Leaguers, and they continue to pursue their militant programme with unmitigated vigour backed as they suppose themselves to be by the Government of India itself".

There had already come into existence Hindu Sabha in the Punjab, U. P. and Bengal. Although the relations of the two communities in Bihar were not so strained as they were in other parts of India, due largely to the restraining influence of Mazharul Haque and Hassan Imam, the action of the Muslim League was making it increasingly necessary that an association of the Hindus should be founded in Bihar also. It was true that Mazharul Haque was one of the founders and also an officer of the League

2 On January 24, 1911 Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya brought a resolution in the Supreme Council to the effect that Muslim representation in the Council should be in proportion to their total population and the contributions they make to the government. He complained that Muslims had secured by means of separate and mixed electorates a larger representation than it could in any way be justified. His speech provoked bitter criticism from the Muslim Members of the Council.

but, it was apprehended that his individual efforts could count for very little "when it is opposed to the general sentiment of an essentially militant community backed by the government". As a matter of fact recent elections held under the reforms Act had caused in great tension of feeling in North Bihar. In some parts of southern Bihar also there was "keen sense of wrong due to the over representation as a result of nomination exercised by the government". Every-where the feeling was gaining ground that Muslim candidates for posts had much greater chance of appointment than their Hindu compatriots.[3] The time was thus ripe for the establishment of a Hindu Association "to protect the interests of the Hindu community".

Elucidating further the objects of the Association he had in view, Parmeshwar Lal observed, "the Association should refrain from encroaching on the province of the National Congress and the Conferences subordi nate to it by leaving alone general, political and administrative questions, which affect all communities equally. It should not take up any religious problems as nothing is more likely to create and foster differences among us than these. Hindus having from time immemorial looked upon religion as a matter of private concern to the individual rather than one of communal interest, the liberty of conscience and belief being one of the corner stones of Hindus social fabric. Regarding question of social reform the association should say nothing, as on these question there is nothing like unanimity of sentiment. The attitude of the Association should be scruplously free from any unfriendliness to any other community of the land, and it should do nothing to embarass the government. It should take steps to produce greater unanimity among the different sections of the people with special regard to the amelioration of the condition of the depressed classes and the diffusion of education among them and among women. In matters political it should be the object of the Association to secure for the Hindus the rights of representation and franchises which are at present enjoyed by the Musalmans and to prevent, if possible, denominational representation being extended to Municipalities and District Boards."

On May 28, 1911 Maharaja Rameshwar Singh asked his office to

3 Dr. Sachchidanand Sinha, who was one of the main organisers of the Bihar Hindu Sabha, would have us believe that in Bihar it did not matter much as to who was appointed in the government service; what did actually matter for them was whether he was a Bihari or not (My Eminent Contemporaries).

inform Parmeshwar Lal, in reply, that the Hindu Association was already in existence and a meeting of the association would be held in August next either at Darbhanga or Muzaffarpur. But the organisers of the meeting continued their efforts. And the following invitation letter was issued on August 1st, 1911, under the signatures of Sachchidanand Sinha, Bal Krishna Sahay, Deep Narayan Singh, Braj Kishore Prasad, Nand Kisore Lal, Krishna Sahay and Parmeshwar Lal.

"A meeting to arrange the preliminaries of the Behar Hindu Sabha will be held at 2 P. M. on Thursday, 17th August next. Your presence is earnestly solicited', Kindly communicate to Mr. Parmeshwar Lal at the Behar Club, if special arrangement is required for your convience".

Accordingly a large aud enthusiastic meeting was held in the Landholders Association on the 17th August. Narayan Prased was in the Chair. Parmeshwar Lal explained the objects of the meeting, and read out messages from gentlemen who could not attend the meeting personally. He claimed that their movement had received "a warm support, and there was an universal desire to form an association to safeguard the right of Hindus". To carry out the said object three suggestions had been put forward. Firstly an association should be started in Bihar on lines similar to those of the other provinces and that it be affiliated to the All India Hindu Association formed at Allahabad last X'mas. Another suggestion was to start an association in the Province on an entirely independent basis. The third and the last suggestion was to revive the old association which had been lying in a dormant condition.

On a request from Langat Singh the whole thing was once again explained in Hindi by Sachchidanand Sinha. While some of the delegates present were in favour of reorganising the old Hindu Sabha (established in 1907) of which the Maharaja of Darbhanga was the President. Krishna Sahay[4] felt that the old association was more or less defunct and

4 According to Krishna Sahay the proposed association should have the following objects :—

(i) To protect and promote the interests of the Hindus of all classes in matters, educational, economical, social, moral, religious and other in best possible ways.

(ii) To promote union and co-operation between Hindus of different castes and classes and between Hindus inhabiting different parts of India.

(iii) To safeguard and promote political interests of Hindus by means of consti-

they should start an organisation denovo. But Braj Kishore Prasad favoured the idea of maintaining the old Sabha with necessary changes in its constitution. This resolution was put to vote and was carried by a majority of 53 to 35. Next Krityanand Singh was unanimously elected President of the Sabha. Parmeshwar Lal and Rajendra Prasad were elected General Secretary and Joint Secretary respectively. The headquarters of the Sabha was to be located at Calcutta with district associations all over Bihar with their separate office-bearers. It was also unanimously decided that the Bengali residents in Bihar were eligible for membership of the Sabha.

APPENDIX

A list of gentlemen who attended the meeting on 17 August 1911.

PATNA DIVISION

Mr. Krishana Sahay, Mr. Kamla Sahay, Mr. Guru Charan Sinha. Rai Radha Krishna Bahadur, Babu Krishna Prakash Singh, Rai Isri Prassad, Babu Brijnandan Singh, Babu Naval Kishore Pande, Prof. Shiveshwar Dayal, Parushuttam Bhat, Babu Mahabir Prasad, Babu Ramanand Prasad, Narayan Singh, Babu Ayodha Prasad, Babu Ram Gopal Choudhry Babu R. B. Lall, Mr. Rai Bahadur Babu Raghunandan Prasad, Lala Mahesh Chand, Ram Anugrah Narayan Singh, Vishnu Dayal, Krishna Ballabh Sahay, Mr. B. B. Lall, Babu Brijmohan Lall, Rai Puran Chandra, Babu Bhawani Sahay, Mr. Chandrabanshi Sahay, Hon'ble Mr. Sachchidanand Sinha, Mr. Akhoury Basudeo Narayan Sinha, Babu Avadhesh Kumar, Babu Nand Kishor Lall, Mr. Parmeshwar Lall, Babu Bishun Prasad, Babu Bachchu Narayan Singh, Babu Harbans Lall, Babu Raghubansh Lall, Babu Adit Prasad Sinha, Babu Deep Naran Lal, Babu Maheshwar Prasad, Babu Mukut Dhari Prasad Singh, Babu Lalit Prasad, Babu Jadunandan Prasad, Babu Kailash Pati, Babu Prasiddh Narayan Lal, Babu Nilkanth Sahay.

TIRHUT DIVISION

Babu Langat Singh. Babu Girija Nandan Singh, Babu Jadunandan Sahay, Babu Dharnidhar, Hon'ble Babu Brajkishore Prasad, Babu Madhav Singh, Babu Tara Prasad Verma, Babu Dwarkanath, Babu Ganga Deva Narayan Singh, Babu Shyam Bihari Lal, Babu Radha Kant,

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tutional and law abiding methods carried on in a spirit of loyalty and respect to the King and the Government.

(iv) To raise and ameliorate the condition of the depressed classes of the community.

Babu Kashi Nath Sahay, B. Sita Ram, Babu Rajendra Prasad, Babu Santa Prasad, Babu Baidya Nath Narayan Sinha, Babu Kapil Deo Sahay, Babu Saraswati Sahay, Babu Brij Kumar Sahay, Babu Girwar Dhari Lal, S. N. Trivedi, Pandit Shiva Prasad, Babu Mahendra Prasad, Hari Kishun Sinha, Bam Bahadur Sinha, Babu Gorakh Prasad, Babu Jugeshwar Sinha.

BHAGALPUR DIVISION

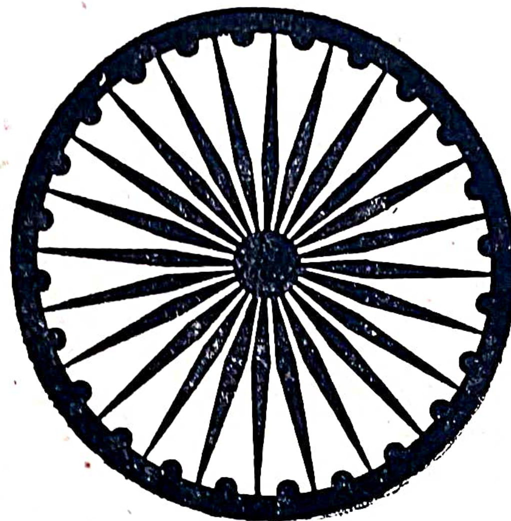
Hon'ble Mr. Deep Narayan Singh, Babu Kartik Prasad.

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